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Betsy Harper's Stint.

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Betsy Harper's Stint.

"THIS ought ye to have done and not to have left the other undone."

Mrs. Timothy Dwight had been reading "The Squire's Two Hundred," and as these closing words fell from her lips, and she turned from the little audience of listeners, a smile of pleasant approbation lighted up all faces. "Beautiful," "charming," was whispered by the more demonstrative. Whether they referred to the story read, or to the reader, was not exactly certain, but in either case the whole scene had been a pretty one.

On the platform, in charming attire, surrounded by beautiful flowers and stately palms, the soft light from the stained glass windows playing now with the dark brown hair, then lighting the deep eyes with a new glow, or casting loving beams of color upon the pale, soft folds of her gown, Mrs. Timothy Dwight in her beautiful setting had made a picture that needed but a bit of imagination to serve as a creation from the canvas of one of the masters.

The meeting closed and many words of praise met the ears of Mrs. Dwight. Out of a really true and gentle heart she expressed her thanks in graceful sentences. She never had been greatly

interested in mission work of any kind, yet each month she had enclosed her little offering in its tiny envelope, and had dropped it into the basket with a "well done" feeling that put her upon most comfortable terms with herself. She often said: "I don't miss it a bit, and it helps, I suppose." It was good to feel that she was a member of a society willing to take her small gifts, and merging them into larger ones, make of the united sum such a respectable "total." Perhaps it was a bit queer, but she had come to take great pride in these "totals" as they were read in the annual meetings.

So, as Mrs. Dwight, with light and airy step, passed down the broad aisle that day, the pleasant words of appreciation in her ears, her heart sang a delightful song of self-gratulation.

But the dream was of short duration. As she reached the door she saw there, as if awaiting her coming, a woman evidently of the working class. Her dress was neat and clean, her white apron spotless, and the basket of broken pieces of cake which she held in her hand, showed plainly that she had been employed to help with the luncheon so daintily served in the parlors below. Judging from her face, she was untutored and apparently a little dull of intellect, but earnestness and sincerity were plainly stamped upon her countenance.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," she said. "May I ask you a question, please?"

The woman's tone was respectful, but there was

a shade of annoyance in Mrs. Dwight's voice as she replied, "Certainly you may."

"Thank you, ma'am. My name is Betsy Harper. I stepped in to rest just a bit before I started home, and I heard what you read. It was lovely, ma'am, it was all lovely, but do you really think it's true?"

"I do not quite understand you. Do I think *what* is true?"

"Why, what you said, ma'am, that everybody who is really Christ's must bring to Him two hundred others. It's such a powerful lot." Mrs. Dwight hesitated. Did she really think that? Had she thought anything about it, except to get just the tone of voice that would fall most pleasantly upon the ear, the exact shading of pronunciation and accent, and to give the whole the most telling and artistic effect? That moment of introspection showed her that her thoughts had dwelt, not upon the awful truth she had stated, but only upon her part in its dramatic rendering. But she could not tell *that* to Betsy Harper; surely not while those great brown eyes were staring at her as if to fathom her thoughts.

"Really, I have given the matter little thought, but now you call my attention to it, it must be the case. But the writer was undoubtedly thinking of people whom *we* never meet, such as Indians, Negroes, and Eskimos—those horrid people who are too lazy to cook, but just live on blubber; the very thought makes me shudder. Our church people will all be saved, *of course*, and so,

Mrs. Harper, you would better not think of it any more. It is so distressing."

"Yes, ma'am, that's true. But if this other is true, won't it be more distressing to us some day, ma'am, not to have thought about it?"

"Oh! you take it too seriously. It is useless to bother your brains about what you cannot help. Have not you enough to worry about that you add this load to your pack?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I have my five children—it's three years now since Roger, that's their father, was killed in the mill. I've thought sometimes nobody had such a hard stretch of it as my self. But I never dreamed the Lord thought I'd ought to be looking out for two hundred beside. Two hundred! I don't see how He *can* expect it."

"Why, He don't expect it of you, nor indeed of any of us. That is just a way of putting it, you know."

"But the words you read, the last ones, weren't they what *He* said? 'This *ought* ye to have done.' That I suppose means taking care of our children and the like; and then it goes on about the two hundred, we're not to leave them 'undone,' He says."

"As I said before, Mrs. Harper, you take it too seriously. No one else thinks of it so. Writers of papers or stories have to put it in that strong way to make it—well, what they call effective. I do not suppose they really mean any one to take it that way."

Betsy Harper looked doubtful, but as she said nothing, Mrs. Dwight bade her a hasty "good day," and passed out into the bright sunshine.

Taking up her basket, Betsy Harper started for her poor little home. But, try as she would, the thoughts that had been awakened would not be silenced. Why did people write such things if they were not true? If they were true, had she really any duty in the matter? She hadn't enough for herself, how then *could* she keep others?

Then her thoughts went back over the three years of her widowhood; how lonely she had been! and the nights when the children had been sick and she could not have a doctor, and there was no one to lend a helping hand! then she had prayed—how she had prayed! and the Lord had answered her just as if she had been a fine lady, instead of a poor working body whom her neighbors sometimes laughed at for her oddity. In her gratitude she had asked the Lord, too, to let her do something for Him, "for," she said, "I don't want everything done for me, and I to do nothing back;" and now this had been shown her.

"I might have managed it," she said, "if there was only *one* of them, but two hundred! why, I couldn't give them a crumb apiece. The Lord Himself must think it an awful big stint for me, but if He wants me to, why, then I'll tackle it."

And Betsy Harper did what she always had done when she came to a place in her road that she called "a genuine piece of corduroy," she prayed.

"*How* I'm ever to do it," she said, "I can't tell.

But there's one blessed thing, the Lord knows what I don't."

Mrs. Timothy Dwight's thoughts ran in a different channel. She had been annoyed, and a shade of that feeling had tinged her whole conversation.

"How absurd!" she said. "Why, the woman needs help herself! Carrying home broken bits for her children, and then talking about taking care of two hundred more needy ones! It does seem as if something was mentally wrong with that whole class. Hereditary unbalance, I suppose. What an awful queer feeling it gave me when she asked, with those great eyes staring at me, if I *really* thought it was true? The idea, when I'd never thought about it at all," and Mrs. Dwight twitched her shoulders as if that "awfully queer" feeling was still with her.

It was Monday morning in Betsy Harper's kitchen. The breakfast was over, the house tidied up, and the older children off for school.

The steaming boiler, the tubs, the baskets of clothes, proclaimed the occupation of the mistress of the little gray house. Shielded by a huge apron, her dress carefully tucked up, her sleeves rolled above her elbows, Betsy Harper began her work. As she worked she talked to herself.

"I don't see," she said, "*how* I'm ever going to make it. Everything is so high, and the children —bless their dear hearts—were never so hungry before, just ready to eat me up all the time, they say. And as for shoes, well, I never saw anything like it! But, dear me, I'll not complain.

What if the dear feet should grow still and never need shoes again."

Just here the boiler sprung a leak, and Betsy Harper, most unhero like, gave a groan of real despair, and sat down in the nearest basket of clothes.

"That old boiler!" she exclaimed. "It makes me numb to look at it, and I can't get a new one, I just can't. Oh dear! if there was only one of me instead of two hundred and one! I'm altogether too many for one pair of hands! I don't see why the good Lord planned it so. But maybe He didn't; maybe somebody shirked, and they didn't know about me at all, that I'd have to make up for them. Oh dear!"

And there she sat, helplessly watching the water running a merry race over the floor.

"I shall never get that floor mopped up," she began again. "If I'd gone at it at once it would have been easy enough, but now it's a regular flood. It's for all the world like my stint. If I could have begun when there was only *one*, it would have been easy enough. Roger always said 'a stitch in time saves nine.' But, oh, my! that boiler!"

Betsy Harper sprang up, shook herself together, and then with an old knife and a saucer of flour, went to work to stop the leak. Somehow she felt stronger when, after many disheartening trials with her improvised soldering outfit, she came off victorious. It does strengthen courage sometimes

to be able to repair even so small a breach as a hole in an old clothes boiler.

Six months have passed since the annual meeting of the missionary society when we first met Betsy Harper; six months of hard labor and much self-denial.

It is a clear October afternoon, and I ask you to follow her, as, dressed in her best, she sets out from her plain little home and walks briskly down the street. You need not look at her to be sure she is on some important errand, for she turns neither to right nor left until she reaches a large book-store in the business center of the city.

Entering the wide door, she is abashed, and if her life had known many retreats perhaps she would have withdrawn now but for the assuring tone of voice with which the urbane and gentlemanly clerk accosts her.

"What can I do for you to-day?"

"I'd like to look at a Testament, sir; one with good, plain letters and put together strong."

"Just step this way, please; I feel sure we can suit you, and we have them for all prices, from eight cents up into dollars."

"Did you say a *whole* Testament for eight cents? You're sure it's all in, are you?"

"Yes, indeed, every word of it. Look at this, ma'am," and he handed her one neatly bound, with clear good type.

"And this, you say, is only eight cents?"

Betsy Harper still held the book, turning the leaves slowly, stopping to catch a word, or to

read a sentence as each new page presented itself. She had quite forgotten the presence of the clerk until he addressed her.

"Would you like that one, ma'am?"

"Yes, sir, I think so. Have you any more of them?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. We always keep these in stock. They're nice to slip into a 'grip,' or carry in the pocket. Would you like another?"

"Two hundred, if you please, sir."

"Two hundred! Why, bless me ma'am, they're all just alike. You surely do not want two hundred of them, do you?"

Try as he would the gentlemanly young man could not keep back the smile the thought excited.

"I may have them if I pay for them, I suppose?"

"Certainly, ma'am."

Drawing out her purse, the one that had served Roger many a year, she slowly counted out the money and laid it down before him.

"That's correct, ma'am; but where shall I send them?"

Carefully giving the address and thanking the young man, she bade him "good day," and left the store.

On the fairest of October days when even the light seemed colored with the tints of the gaily decked autumn trees, Mrs. Timothy Dwight, in calling costume, descended the broad stone steps of her stately home. Lingering a moment to

take in the beauty of the view, the wide lawn, the well-kept walks, the beds of late blooming flowers, she saw a queer procession entering her gate-way. A boy of some twelve years, shabbily dressed, was pushing a two-wheeled cart which a woman was pulling by a rope fastened at either side.

"Of all things this is the queerest," murmured Mrs. Dwight, as the intruders approached. Her surprise was not lessened by the salutation that followed.

"Good day, ma'am," said the woman, her face bright with pleasure. "I'm so glad I've found you, for I didn't know at all which of these fine houses might be yours. I watched you that day, but was'nt sure just where you stopped. Many's the time I've thought I'd have to give it up. But I think, as I look back over all the long, hard days that it took, that for once He'll have to say: 'Betsy, that's well done.'"

Too astonished to speak Mrs. Dwight stood looking into the woman's face. It flushed under the scrutiny. She had expected at least a smile of recognition. But as Mrs. Dwight did not speak she felt compelled to go on.

"You know, ma'am, you said that every one of us who loves the dear Lord, and I'm sure I do, must tell two hundred others about Him. I couldn't leave the children to go myself, and I couldn't pay anyone else for telling them for me, and so I've done all I could," and she drew off an

old shawl that covered the cart and showed Mrs. Dwight the contents.

Testaments, nothing but Testaments.

Still Mrs. Dwight was silent. Nervous and hesitating, Betsy Harper went on again.

"And you see, ma'am, it took every dollar I had to buy them, and so I thought maybe you'd be sending too, and would let me put mine in with yours; it would be such a help to me, ma'am, indeed it would."

"I be sending, too," gasped Mrs. Dwight. "I do not understand at all what you mean."

Hearing the door open behind her, Mrs. Dwight turned to meet her husband.

"Oh! my dear," she exclaimed, "do, if you can, find out what all this means?"

Stepping to the cart Mr. Dwight took up one after another of the books, and with his lawyer's tact began a series of questions that he intended should lead up to an explanation of the queer scene.

"You've a good many books here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are they all alike?"

"Not quite, sir. Some are blue and some are brown. I think the brown ones will wear the best."

"Yes, perhaps so," with a smile, "but I mean, are they all the same inside?"

"Just the same, sir. Of course I haven't read them all, but the young man said so, sir."

"How many have you here?"

"Two hundred, sir."

"Two hundred! Why, how did you come to get so many?"

"Why, because of what this lady here—she's your wife, sir, isn't she?—told me."

"My wife told you?"

"Yes, sir," Betsy Harper replied, and her

tone showed that she was weary of all this trifling; "you wife said, 'each of us is responsible for *two hundred* souls, or at least for their hearing the gospel. Them's the very words, sir, I couldn't forget them if I tried, and I couldn't go and tell it to them, sir, and so I thought I'd send the Testaments and let them read it themselves."

"Oh! Timothy," interrupted Mrs. Dwight, "it was that meeting, that annual meeting that has done all this. Oh, this is dreadful! You know I told you a woman spoke to me as I came out, she told me her name,——"

"Betsy Harper, ma'am."

"Yes, Mrs. Harper, and she took it all for actual earnest, and I couldn't make her see that no one ever thinks of really doing such a thing. I suppose I read what she said, or something like it, but of course I didn't expect any one was going to take it up seriously."

"Oh!" replied her husband. "Do I understand that you read what none of you except this woman believed? That your part in the meeting was given just for the stage effect?"

"Now, dear, don't tease. Of course we believe it in a way. But you know, dear, if we had believed it as Mrs. Harper does, none of us could have rested day or night until we had done *something*. Oh, this is really distressing!"

"Distressing! yes I should say so—distressing that any child of God could read a statement like that, and then forget it. But perhaps I can arrange this. Mrs. Harper, what did these books cost you?"

"Sixteen dollars, sir."

"How did you get the money, may I ask?"

"Why, sir, we all worked, and I did extra washing and Ted here he helped with the rubbing, and then the children went barefoot and that saved shoes, and we gave up coffee and sugar, sir, and that helped; indeed, sir, we just worried

along until we got it all, and then, sir, I bought them."

"But why did you bring them here?"

"Why, you see, sir, there will not be many more warm days like these, and the cold weather is harder for us, sir, for we *must* have fire and shoes, and I couldn't see how I could pay for sending them so far; and so I thought, sir, your wife might be willing to send them with hers. If I waited till another summer, perhaps a good many of *my* two hundred might be gone."

"Yes, I see. Where did you want them to go?"

"Why to the ones your wife told me of; I looked them up in Ted's geography; they live in Alaska, poor souls, and I thought, perhaps she'd send them before the dreadful cold comes on. They'd be so nice for them to read in the long winter evenings."

"You mean the Eskimos, I suppose?"

"Yes, they're the ones—the Eskimos."

"Well, Mrs. Harper, you may, if you please leave them in my wife's care, and I will promise that they shall get these books or something that will serve them better. If Ted, here, will help, we'll carry them in."

And Mr. Dwight began to fill his arms with the blue and brown volumes. When they were all safely stored upon a table in the library of the attractive home, Betsy Harper stood looking at the goodly pile, her face full of delight, for to her they were the most beautiful of the many rare objects that adorned the room; nay, they were more than that to her, for each one of these volumes meant an answered prayer.

Mr. Dwight recalled her thoughts from their wanderings. Mrs. Harper," he said, "I see to-day what life might be if one would but follow, step by step, after the Master. What wonderful things we might do for Him if we would only

take Him at His word and put individual hearts into His work! You have shown me to-day how wonderfully God honors such faith."

"*I*, sir! I do not understand you."

"Quite likely not. You had no thought of me when you aimed your arrow at the far-away Eskimos, and certainly you did not think it would lodge in a heart near home."

A few words will finish my little story.

One evening Mr. Dwight invited a dozen or more of his friends to dine with him. In the hour of chat that followed the repast he told the story of Betsy Harper's stint. He then offered the Testaments for sale, the proceeds to go to the Eskimo work in Alaska, the books to be sent to one of the "Homes" of the city for distribution.

In a few moments the sixteen dollars Betsy Harper had so painfully earned had grown to two hundred and fifty. Then, with emotion visible in face and voice, Mr. Dwight took up one of the little brown volumes. "I should like to own this," he said, "and I will give fifty dollars for it. I mean to carry it always with me. The very sight of it will be an incentive to higher, better service for my Master. It will be a token ever reminding me that God looks back of all our attempts to serve Him to the heart. He counted Betsy Harper's love and zeal as more than all our knowledge of the world's need. This we know by the way in which He has blessed her service.

"Thinking of my own luke-warm service, my soul is filled with shame. But I pledge myself to begin at once upon what the Lord has apportioned out to me, and will surely require of me—as my stint."

Dear fellow Christians, whose eyes may rest upon these lines, how is it with you? Have you finished your stint? EMMA P. TREAT.

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